

BOOKS

Proving God's Existence

St. Anselm of Canterbury (A.D. 1033-1109), a Platonic Christian who was regarded in his day as “the second Augustine,” uniquely set the stage for the later development of modern science, in that he based all of his argument not on the authority of Scripture, but on the force of reason alone.

The first three volumes of this set (the second volume is currently out of print), include the complete writings of Anselm, and the fourth contains a number of critical essays by Jasper Hopkins. I will focus for the purpose of this review on Anselm's proof of the existence of God as it is presented in the *Proslogium* and is elaborated upon in Anselm's *Reply to Gaunilo*, the monk who attempted to refute Anselm's argument in the short work entitled *On Behalf of the Fool*.

After thanking God for having created him in His triune image, so that he might remember, conceive, and love Him, Anselm says in Chapter II of the *Proslogium* that we believe God is something “than which nothing greater can be thought.” According to Anselm, even the fool who says in his heart that God does not exist, is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be thought. And yet that than which nothing greater can be thought, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, if it were only in the understanding, then it could be thought to exist also in reality—which is greater.

“Therefore, if that, than which a greater cannot be thought existed only in the understanding, then that than which a greater *cannot* be thought would be that than which a greater *can* be thought! But surely this conclusion is impossible. Hence, without doubt, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.”

Most commentators historically have focussed on the argument as developed thus far to the exclusion of what follows.

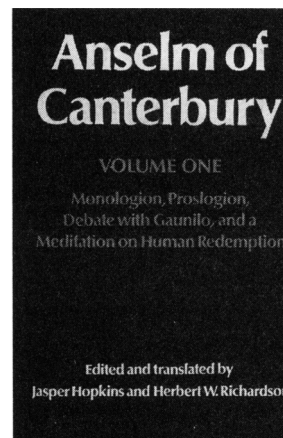
In Chapter III, Anselm argues that God exists so truly that He cannot even be thought not to exist. “For, there can be thought to exist something whose non-existence is inconceivable; and this thing is greater than anything whose non-existence is conceivable. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought could be thought not to exist, then that than which a greater cannot be thought would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought—a contradiction. Hence, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly [really] that it cannot even be thought not to exist.”

Anselm continues: If a mind could conceive of something better than God, “the creature would rise above the Creator and would sit in judgment over the Creator—an utterly preposterous consequence.” Indeed, whatever else exists, except God alone, can be conceived not to exist.

In Chapter IV, Anselm argues that the fool says what cannot be conceived, that God does not exist, only insofar as he uses the word God nominally, without understanding the essence to which the word refers.

In Chapter I of his *Reply to Gaunilo*, Anselm clarifies that “that than which a greater cannot be thought can only be thought to exist without a beginning. Now, whatever can be thought to exist but does not exist can be thought to begin to exist.”

Thus, as Anselm argues in Chapter IV, everything, with the exception of that which exists supremely, can be thought not to exist. “Indeed, all and only things which have a beginning or an end or are composed of parts—and whatever (as I have already said) at any place or time does not exist as a whole—can be thought not to exist. But only that in which there is no conceivable beginning or end or combination of parts, and only that which exists as a whole everywhere and always, cannot be thought not to exist.”



Anselm of Canterbury
edited and translated by
Jasper Hopkins and
Herbert W. Richardson
Edwin Mellen Press, Toronto, 1976
hardbound, Vol. I, \$79.75; Vol. III,
\$89.95; Vol. IV, \$89.95

In Chapter IX of the *Reply*, Anselm further argues that “someone who conceives of that than which a greater cannot be thought does not conceive of what is able not to exist but rather conceives of what is not able not to exist. Hence, it is necessarily the case that what he conceives of exists—because whatever is able not to exist is not what he conceives of.”

Further History of the Argument

St. Thomas Aquinas seems to have rejected Anselm's proof, arguing in the *Summa Theologica* that although the existence of God is self-evident *of itself*, it must nonetheless be demonstrated from the effects of his creation, since His existence is not necessarily self-evident *to us*.

But the brilliance of Anselm's argument is that any rational mind created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and having the capacity for God (*capax Dei*) is led to the existence of God as that being than which a greater cannot be conceived, because everything created, including the human mind, has a beginning and thus necessarily presupposes an Absolutely Infinite Creator. The

demonstration by means of effects is thus subsumed by the proposition that God is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

In his “Defense of Learned Ignorance” (1449), Nicolaus of Cusa embraced St. Anselm’s argument by writing: “No one was ever so foolish as to maintain that God, who forms all things, is anything other than that than which a greater cannot be conceived.”

In the 17th Century, Descartes put forward a flawed, “rationalist” version of Anselm’s proof, which became known as the “ontological” proof of the existence of God. In his *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz commended Descartes for reviving Anselm’s argument and criticized the Scholastics, including Aquinas, for dismissing Anselm’s argument as fallacious, but Leibniz did not consider Descartes’ proof to be adequate.

Taking advantage of the inadequacy of Descartes’ “ontological” argument,

Immanuel Kant concluded that God’s existence is merely a useful idea, but not provable. Kant’s criticism, like that of Gaunilo’s before him, is ultimately based upon his Aristotelian (empiricist) method, according to which only that exists, which exists contingently as an object of the senses. This method necessarily denies the existence of that which exists non-contingently.

Although Anselm’s proof and Leibniz’s attempts to improve upon it have been followed by the contributions of others, the most important contribution to this subject is found in the essay by Lyndon LaRouche entitled “On the Subject of God” (*Fidelio*, Vol. II, No. 1, Spring 1993).

LaRouche supplements the proofs of Plato, Augustine, Anselm, and Leibniz by applying the distinction between the Absolute Infinite and the transfinite, which Georg Cantor derived in part from the work of Nicolaus of Cusa in proving the impossibility of squaring a

circle. LaRouche writes that “‘the hypothesizing the higher hypothesis,’ the highest state of mind corresponding to comprehension of Plato’s and Cantor’s *Becoming*, is bounded by the unchanged cause of change (for increase of potential population-density), the Good. This relationship of the lesser (Becoming) to its master (Good) parallels somewhat the bounding of the inferior species, a polygonal process, by the higher species, circular action.”

In the critical essays which appear in Volume IV, Jasper Hopkins, who later went on to translate many of the works of Nicolaus of Cusa, unfortunately is only too ready to agree with the Aristotelians who have historically attacked Anselm’s proof as “unsound.” Nonetheless, his translations of Anselm’s complete works are to be recommended as an invaluable source of the writings of a great Christian Platonist, who insisted on the primacy of the principle of intelligibility.

—William F. Wertz, Jr.

Creation According to Moses

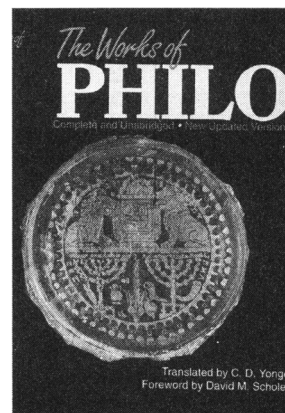
Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, Egypt lived from 20 B.C. to A.D. 50. He was the Greek-Jewish philosopher who synthesized the best of Plato and the Septuagint (Hebrew Bible in Greek translation). According to Eusebius, he collaborated with Peter the Apostle in Rome.

The significance of this one-volume edition being re-issued last year in an updated version, must be seen in the historical context of both the ongoing Vatican-Jewish-Islamic dialogue against the genocidal “population control” policies promoted at the U.N. conference in Cairo, Egypt last September, as well as the moves on the part of the Israeli and Arab leaderships, and the U.S. Clinton Administration, to establish peace in that troubled part of the world.

In numerous of his writings, Lyndon LaRouche has pointed out that we are indebted to Philo’s “A Treatise on the Account of the Creation of the World, as Given by Moses” for being the first explicit elaboration in the Judeo-Christian tradition of the concept that man is created in the image of God (*imago Dei*)

insofar as he is capable of creativity, and that it is this creativity which distinguishes man from mere beasts. “On Creation” can thus be read as an affirmation of the outlook of Plato’s *Timaeus*, and as a direct attack on the contrary Aristotelian viewpoint.

As the translator Yonge points out in the Preface to the original 1859 edition, “. . . it appears to have been a saying among the ancients that, ‘either Plato philonises, or Philo platonises.’” We encounter Philo’s Platonist outlook throughout these works, as when he describes the difficulty of discovering and communicating truth, and its relation to creativity, in terms reminiscent of Plato’s parable of the Cave, and of the later reflection of this in St. Paul, that “we see as in a mirror darkly”: “[N]o one, whether poet or historian, could ever give expression in an adequate manner to the beauty of his ideas respecting the creation of the world; for they surpass all the power of language, and amaze our hearing, being too great and venerable to be adapted to the sense of any created being.”



**The Works of Philo,
Complete and Unabridged**
translated by C.D. Yonge,
Foreword by David M. Scholer
Hendrickson, Peabody, 1993
918 pages, hardbound, \$30.00

To the question, then, how man can attain knowledge, Philo responds: love God, and love wisdom. He makes use of literal, allegorical, moral, and analogical methods throughout his works, to introduce the reader to various biblical characters who embody these teachings, most importantly the philosopher-king-priest-prophet Moses. Some Philo biographers think these essays were original-